March, 2006, in connection with the release of fishermen of Gujarat languishing in the jails of Pakistan;

(b) whether they have proposed to enter into an agreement with the Government of Pakistan on the lines of agreement done in the past with the Sri Lanka Government, to solve the similar problem; and

(c) if so, the progress made in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED) (a) A delegation led by Shri Arjunbhai Modhwadia, Leader of Opposition in the Gujarat Vidhan Sabha, and Shri Ahmad Patel, MP met Prime Minister of 3rd April, 2006. Besides, on 6th March, 2006, 19 Hon'ble Members of Parliament from Gujarat sent a letter to the Prime Minister on this issue.

(b) In this letter, the Hon'ble Members proposed an agreement with Pakistan on the lines of an agreement with Sri Lanka. However, there is no formal agreement with Sri Lanka on this issue. The existing bilateral arrangement with Sri Lanka for fishermen has been worked out through mutual understanding between the two countries during deliberations of working groups and a formal MoU is yet to be signed.

(c) Government has been taking up the issue of the release of Indian fishermen and their boats regularly with Pakistan at the Home Secretary level talks on May 30-31, 2006 in Islamabad. In these talks, the two countries reached an understanding under which both sides agreed to expedite release of fishermen and civilian prisoners and complete necessary formalities like grant of consular access and confirmation of national status in the earliest possible time. Pakistan has so far released 93 Indian fishermen in 2006. 412 Indian fishermen and 287 boats continue to be in Pakistani custody.

Threat to PIO in Nepal

†2913. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD:
SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Nepalese Maoists have threatened to the people of Indian origin in Nepal to leave Nepal.

(b) if so, the facts thereof;

(c) whether Government have taken safety measures for people of Indian origin in Nepal; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(d) if so, details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) There have been various incidents of extortion and intimidation against business and industrial units in Nepal by the CPN (Maoists) and their affiliated trade unions. These have also targeted people of India origin and Indian joint ventures.

(c) and (d) Cases involving safety and security of people of Indian origin in Nepal and Indian joint ventures have been taken up by the Government of India with the Government of Nepal including at the highest levels. The Government of Nepal has been requested to investigate these cases and provide security and safety to people of Indian origin and Indian joint ventures whose welfare and security is of prime concern to the Government of India.

Acquiring of nuclear bombs by Pakistan

†2914. SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:
SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that Pakistan has acquired capability to develop forty-fifty nuclear bombs;

(b) if so, facts thereof and whether it is also a fact other countries of the world have also confirmed the same; and

(c) if so, the names of the countries that have confirmed it?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ANAND SHARMA): (a) to (c) There is no definitive information on the size of the Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. However, a US based non-governmental Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) in a report stated that Pakistan was making a second heavy water production reactor inside the Khushab complex which was capable of producing enough plutonium for 40 to 50 nuclear weapons a year. The report was subsequently disputed by the US National Security Council. According to a New York Times report of August 3, 2006, the US National Security Council Spokesman Frederick Jones said that "US Government experts believe that the reactor is expected to be substantially smaller and less capable than reported". Pakistani Ambassador to Washington Mahmud Ali Durrani has also been reported on 4 August 2006 stating that the ISIS report was grossly exaggerated.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.